[1] Introduction

[3] La Guajira Península is situated between 12°-28'-30" and 10°-56' north latitude and 1°-11' and 3° east longitude, taking as a base the meridian of Bogotá. It occupies the northeastern part of Colombia and the most northernmost part of the South American continent. Its boundaries can be defined as follows: on the north and west the Caribbean Sea, on the east Lake Maracaibo, and on the south the department of Magdalena and the neighboring republic of Venezuela. In other words, the Caribbean Sea, Lake Maracaibo, the Río Hacha, and the arroyo Paraguaichón serve as natural boundaries. Part of this peninsula belongs to the republic of Colombia and part, the smaller area, to Venezuela.

[13] Its general geological formation appears to be due to the elevation of marine strata, since fossils of sea fauna are found in the subsoil. Its soil is composed of clay, sand, and calcareous strata on the plains, the higher parts belonging to a more ancient formation composed of volcanic rocks, crystalline slate, granite, [15] marble, and jasper, covered by layers of limestone. The predominating minerals are: gypsum, carbonate of lime, argonite, mica, iron ores, and some outcroppings of lignite which have not been exploited up to the present time.

[23] La Guajira proper, as a natural geographical region, starts in the west with the last spurs of the Montes de Oca, a continuation of the Cordillera Oriental in Colombia which crosses the Sierra de Perijá and Serranía de los Motilones, mountains whose beneficial influence is felt in the zones of Carraipía and Paraguaichón. But the characteristic relief starts in the southwestern neck and is composed of isolated ridges of mountains whose general orientation is northwest-southeast, running from west to east and known by the names of Cojoro, Jarara, and Macuira. The last has the [2] highest altitude in La Guajira, 857 meters above sea level, according to Brun (1), and runs out between Jiguaipolu and Parajimarú on the

[11]

1. Cited by Pichón in Geografía de la Península Guajira [Geography of La Guajira Peninsula].

eastern coast of the peninsula.

[2 cont.]

133 The greater part of the coast of La Guajira, which measures in all some 350 kilometers, belongs to Colombia. It starts from the Río Hacha in the west and extends to Lake Maracaibo in the east. It may be divided into two general parts, one low and liable to flooding, the other highland rising sheer from the coast. The low part starts from Pajaina Channel, which flows into Lake Maracaibo in front of San Carlos Island and continues approximately to the port of Cojoro. From there onward the land rises from the sea in the form of cliffs roughly to the level of Castilletes, a point where the coast level descends slightly to rise again near Punta Espada due to the eastern spurs from the Sierra de Macuira, which, as we have noted in previous paragraphs, then lose themselves in the sea. From this point, going always toward the west, the coast is rocky and inaccessible because of its continental structure.

[195 347] In the far western part of the La Guajira coast we find the most important saltworks that are being exploited in the country, such as those of Pájaro, Manaure, and Bahía Honda which supply salt to the major part of the coastal departments and even to those in the interior of the republic. The coast of this part has numerous beautiful and deep bays among which Bahía Honda is outstanding. Along the coast rich fishing grounds are found, such as [136] Bahía Honda, Cabo de la Vela, Cardón, and Carrizal, centers of fishing and pearl exploitation. Unfortunately, it has not been found practicable to make use of all the commercial navigation [318] and fishing possibilities of this coast due to the absence of potable water in the vicinity. This we were well able to appreciate when we found that the water required for drinking in Carrizal and San José de Bahía Honda, during our stay in these regions, was transported distances greater than ten kilometers.

361 504 The most important ports of the coast of La Guajira, from west to east, are Ahuyama; Manaure, center of the salt industry; Cardón and Carrizal, pearl fishing centers; San José de Bahía Honda, on the bay of the same name, also engaged in the salt industry, and Puerto Estrella, center of the maritime traffic of motorized sailing boats plying between the islands of Aruba and Curaçao, and Puerto López.